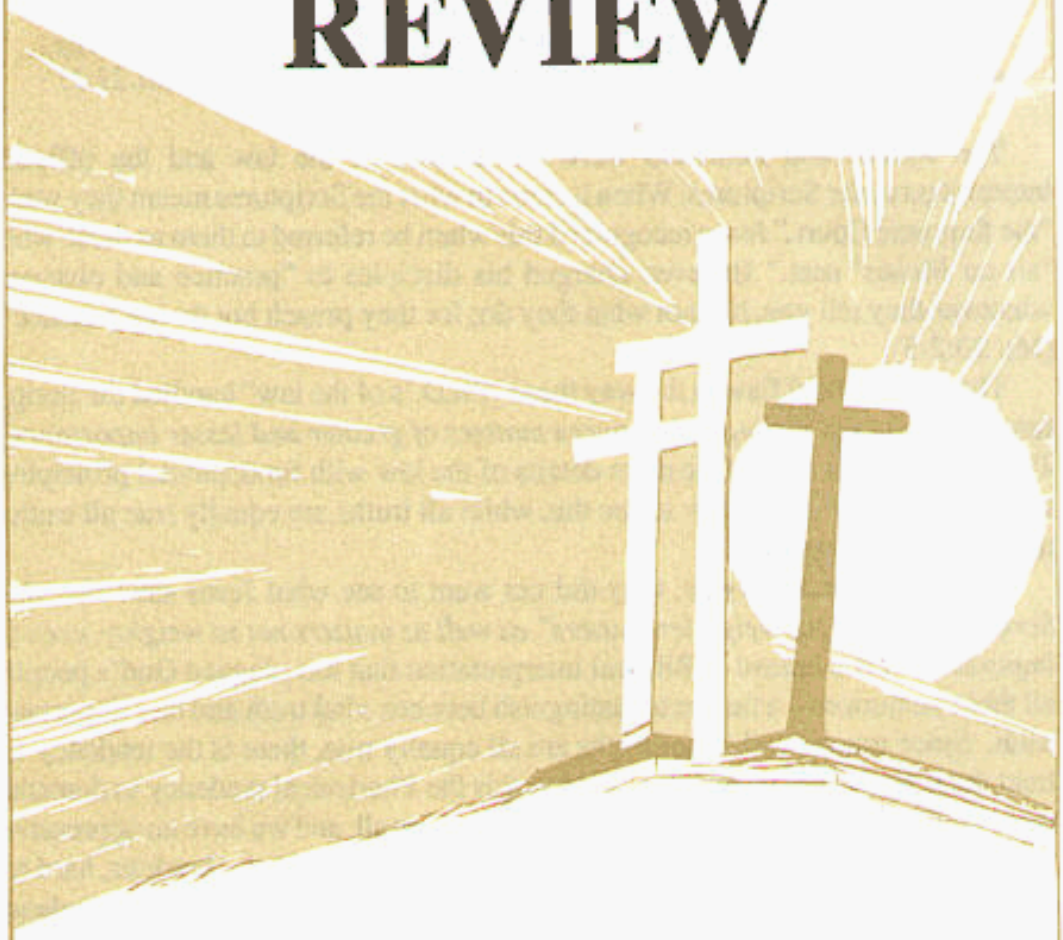
RESTORATION REVIEW



Unitarians can be completely honest with one another. There is no "conforming" to which they must adhere. They can speak their minds on all issues freely, for there are no "off limit" signs, no forbidden areas of thought, no prohibited doubts, that will make one an outcast.— from *Unitarians Universalists Believe*

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The Unitarians: "Deeds Not Creeds"

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The Sense of Scripture: Studies in Interpretation . . .

THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

> *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith;. these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. —Mt. 23.23*

The scribes and Pharisees were the doctors of the law and the official interpreters of the Scriptures. When it came to what the Scriptures meant they were "the Supreme Court." Jesus recognized this when he referred to them as those who "sit on Moses' seat." He even charged his disciples to "practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach but do not practice" (Mt. 23:2-3).

There was a fatal flaw in the way these "Ph.D.'s of the law" handled the Scriptures: *they did not distinguish between matters of greater and lesser importance.* This caused them to confuse mere details of the law with fundamental principles of the law. They were slow to see that while all truths are equally true all truths are not equally important.

Or to put it another way, they did not want to see what Jesus saw: *that the Scriptures have "the weightier matters" as well as matters not so weighty, even if important.* It is a hazard in Biblical interpretation that has plagued God's people all these centuries - a failure to distinguish between vital truth and less important truth. Since greater and lesser truths are all equally true, there is the tendency to treat them as equally significant. Add to this the Pharisaical tendency to demand more of others than of oneself, which may plague us all, and we have an oppressive religion. There is thus Jesus' stinging rebuke: "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them upon men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Mt. 23:24).

The "burdens" that the Pharisees imposed upon their people were their own interpretations of what it meant to keep the law, such as observing the Sabbath. These are preserved in the Mishnah, and when one reads these regulations today he may be tempted to laugh at such legalistic hairsplitting, but he is to remember that they were serious business to the Jews of Jesus' time since they spelled out in minute detail how the law was to be observed. Take, for example, some of the rules on what constituted work on the Sabbath day:

A knot could be tied if it could be untied with one hand.

A bucket may be tied to a belt but not to a rope.

One may spit if he Spits on a smooth surface but not on a rough surface.

> If a woman wore drawers and took aught out therein either in front of her or behind her, she is culpable, since it is likely to move around.
>
> If one man bears a loaf of bread he is culpable, but if two men bear it they are not.
>
> A woman may not go out with a needle that has an eye, or with a ring that bears a seal, or with a cochlea brooch, or with a spice-box or a perfume-flask.
>
> A cripple may go out with his wooden stump. But if it has a cavity for pads it is susceptible to uncleanness.

On and on it goes. The Mishnah is more than twice the size of the New Testament and it is filled with such minute legalisms as these. The scribes often debated at length on what violated the Sabbath and what did not May a man write letters of the alphabet on the Sabbath? If he forgets it is the Sabbath and writes as many as two letters he is guilty so long as it makes a lasting mark. May he scratch letters on his skin, such as write in the palm of the hand as students like to do on examination day? Rabbi Eliezer insisted that such would violate the Sabbath while Rabbi Joshua declared that it was allowable.

This is what our Lord had to put up with in his dealings with the scribes and Pharisees. To them "the law" was not only what was written in the Scriptures but all the traditions as well. The tithing of mint, dill, and cummin was part of the minutiae of rabbinic tradition. These were spices and were not specifically named in the law as things to be tithed, but the rabbis advised that they be tithed, for it would make one more righteous. And so Jesus is saying that they were sticklers for the law as to tithe even spices and yet they ignored the laws that really matter.

We can better understand Jesus calling them hypocrites when he could see them examining a wooden leg in search for a cavity or a needle to see if it had an eye, while wholly indifferent to their own neglect of mercy and justice. It must have raised his ire to see the Pharisees examine a woman suspected of having something stuffed in her underwear, for if the object slipped from front to hack it would be work and a violation of the Sabbath! Or to see them watch where a man expectorated, for if his spittle fell on something porous the absorption would require nature to work and the Sabbath would be violated! And yet they would turn their backs to "the sinners," however needy they might be. And so he blasted them as Hypocrites!

Before we join our Lord in excoriating the Pharisees we would do well to look at ourselves. We draw lines on each other over whether "the cup" is one or multiple, whether it contains fermented or unfermented liquid, or whether it is served by a woman. We have argued over round and shaped notes, lesson leaves, graded classes, tuning forks, melodeons, organs, societies, kitchens, fellowship halls. We reject "those for whom Christ died" when they

divorce, speak in tongues, think a different thought, entertain a new idea, drink wine, associate with "brothers in error,' communicate with Carl Ketcherside or read *Integrity* or *Restoration Review.* Our colleges have fifed people for attending a Full Gospel Men's Fellowship, going to the wrong church, speaking in tongues, assigning the wrong books, and for being "liberal." Many a teacher has had his class taken from him because he suggested that the Church of Christ is also a denomination, that we are not the only Christians, that instrumental music is not necessarily a sin, or just for being different. I know, for I have talked to scores of them by phone. We are as watchful over our unwritten creeds as the Pharisees ever were of their traditions. Moreover, we are often downright discourteous, rude, and unfair toward those "in error," and these are sometimes missionaries who dare to cross party lines and are forthwith abandoned on a foreign field with no support. Often our ethics is that "heretics" and "liberals" have no rights. How merciful, loving, and just are we in all these things? Are we too hypocrites?

We have here another principle of hermeneutics: We are to interpret the Bible in terms of the weightier matters and the greater truths. And it is the Lord himself who lays down the rule. If he would speak of weightier matters it is evident that there are lighter matters.

At least twice in Scripture we find Jesus referring to this rule. When the Pharisees questioned his eating with sinners and tax collectors, he invited them to make a study of Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." Jesus urged them to go and find out what the prophet meant (Mt. 9:13). It was an appeal to the weightier matters. When the Pharisees questioned him for allowing his disciples to pluck ears of grain on the Sabbath he again appealed to Hosea's great line, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Mt 12:7). This time he says to them, "If you had known what this means you would not have condemned the guiltless."

If you had known what this means... gets to the heart of Biblical interpretation. We may know the letter of the Bible without knowing its spirit. Jesus is really pointing us to what the Bible is all about, the weightier matters of peace, mercy, grace, justice, and as Micah 6:8 adds, "walking humbly before God."

Another way of stating this principle is that the Bible, as well as all of life, must be seen in true perspective. An alarming characteristic of the human mind is that it can lose all sense of proportion. A person can see things of no importance alongside things of eternal importance, even in his own life, and make no distinction between them. William Barclay tells of the Scotsman who wrote in his diary on a given day that his wife had given birth to a son and he had received a green swallow from Jamaica. With an astonishing lack of perspective he placed the birth of a man child into the world, even his own son, and the arrival of a green swallow side by side.

We do this when we make the time and frequency of the Lord's Supper as important as the meaning of the Lord's Supper. It is a lack of perspective that causes us to consider the how of singing hymns, doing missions, or caring for the needy as much as the acts themselves. We sometimes get so lopsided that we will not do good things, and will even hinder others doing them, if the how is not our way. Jesus being the judge, it is safe to conclude that it is better to err on the side of being too merciful or too yielding than to be too exact and too demanding.

I am reminded of the preacher who insisted that the use of instrumental music is as serious a sin as adultery. I could not believe he really believed that. His approach to the Bible forced him to such a conclusion.

Paul had a sense of proportion when on the one hand he gladly circumcised Timothy but on the other hand adamantly refused to circumcise Titus. Differences in circumstance affect the way a matter is decided. The "necessary things" that the apostles imposed upon the Gentile churches in Acts 15 were crucial to their circumstance, but they have little importance to us. A man might fight in one war but be a protester in the next. This sense of perspective, which is balanced thinking, is to guide our study of the Bible. We will then no longer argue over unimportant details or over issues that do not matter. Many lives have been made miserable and many churches have been torn asunder over trifles.

The right perspective is ours — the proper balance — when we have our eye fixed upon the Cross and upon God's grace. When all things in life are measured in the light of the eternal verities, then life will be whole and eternity secure. This is what our Lord meant when he spoke of "If thine eye be single (sound), thy whole body shall be full of light" (Mt. 6:22). He had just said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If our treasure is heavenly things, "the weightier matters," then the eye is sound and life will be rightly proportioned.

Another way to say all this is that religion can be bogus as well as real, false as well as true. False or bogus religion can have its prooftexts right out of the Bible. The Pharisees are testimony that religion can be bad and yet "scriptural." Jesus said they searched the Scriptures, but they missed the weightier matters.

I am persuaded that the one essential ingredient of true religion is humility before God. A religion that makes people arrogant and self-righteous cannot be true religion. The one thing that God requires along with justice and mercy is to walk humbly before God. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart," Pro. 3:5 urges us, "and lean not upon thine own understanding." That says it all, and such humility comes only as we surrender our pride at the foot of the Cross and glory in the grace of God, and pray the sinner's prayer, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

That prayer, which so impressed our Lord, is surely one of the weightier truths of the Bible. Grace and mercy along with humility and prayer is what true religion is all about. —*the Editor*

An Honest man is the noblest work of God.-- *Alexander Pope*

Our heritage is composed of all the voices that can answer our questions. —*Andre Malraus*

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THE UNITARIANS: "DEEDS NOT CREEDS"

(This is the third of a series of reports on my visit to churches in my home town of Denton, Texas. The purpose is to inform and enlighten. to correct misunderstandings, and to show that in spite of differences we all have a great deal in common. It is also my way of sharing with you what has proven to he an exciting adventure in better understanding. — the Editor)

The building is across the back street from the First Christian Church, not all that conspicuous to the passing public. A modest sign reads "Unitarian Universalist Fellowship." A "Family Fellowship" was advertised for 10:30, but no one was there at that time. While I waited in my car for the first arrivals, I thought of my own Church of Christ, where most of us arrive either at the last moment or late. A few women and children began to appear, but I decided that was not "family" enough for me to intrude upon and waited for the main service at 11:00. When some 20 people began to assemble I eagerly joined them. Having already attended a rather large 8:00 service at a Church of Christ, I was to have a very different experience with the Unitarians.

I could not have been received more graciously. As is usually the case in these visits there were people there that I knew. Once the service began I was asked to introduce myself. The service was informal and laid back, not unlike a gathering in a home. Announcements were made and there was a sharing of concerns. I sensed the empathy when it was reported that a friend had given birth to twins, both stillborn. There were other hurts and problems referred to. There was evidence of "a caring community of the concerned," as the Unitarians describe their idea of a church. But there were no prayers, which is reflective of their rejection of what they call "a kind of miraculous conversation bringing heavenly results."

But their official statements indicate that they do believe in prayer "as a means of articulating for our own good our concerns, fears, and aspirations." They say that prayer "helps to objectify our goals, and that is its major purpose." This means that in prayer they are talking

only to themselves, a means of inspiring and encouraging one another. This is consistent with their humanistic view of things. There is no God (in the Biblical sense) to hear prayer, and when they refer to God it is in a poetic or symbolic sense, or it is equated with Nature. To them "child of God" and "child of the universe" are synonymous.

While they would not pray the Lord's Prayer in their service, they do have what they call "Our Affirmation," which was printed in their Order of Service (I doubt if they would use "Order of Worship" since, as they see it, there is nothing to worship except themselves or Humankind), and which we would all applaud insofar as it goes.

> Love is the doctrine of this fellowship
> The quest of truth is its prayer
> To dwell together in peace
> To seek Knowledge in freedom
> To serve others in community
> To the end that all may grow into harmony with creation
> Thus we do covenant with each other and with ourselves.

The "Reading" of the service was the Hypocratic Oath, which was the basis of a presentation by an obviously concerned woman on health care in our community, particularly in reference to the indigent. Some discussion followed. While there was not a single reference to Scripture in this service, there might have been, for the Bible is sometimes referred to as a possible source of truth just as the Koran might be, or Tagore or Shakespeare or Emerson, particularly Emerson who is one of their patron saints, if they have patron saints. If you want a *"feel"* of the Unitarian spirit read Ralph Waldo Emerson. In their tract rack they have a booklet on "What Emerson Says." Good stuff!

The nearest to anything liturgical in this non-liturgical church was the singing of hymns and the lighting of the chalice. A woman lighted a candle as she told of passing the state boards in family counseling. I happened to know her and afterward offered congratulations. Unitarians are usually highly sophisticated, which makes it unlikely that a small Texas city would have a Unitarian church. But our city has two state universities.

That the Unitarians sing hymns I found a little surprising, especially hymns by Isaac Watts! No hymns of course are sung to Christ since they do not claim to be Christians, and none to God in any transcendent sense. So, how could they sing Watts' hymns, that eminent Christian poet? They sang Watts' "From All That Dwell Below The Skies," or rather their own rendition of it. Here is the first verse as Watts wrote it:

From all that dwell below the skies
Let the Creator's praise arise;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Let the Redeemer's name be sung
Thro' every land, by every tongue.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Inspired by Psalms 117, Watts wrote that great hymn of praise to God and in adoration of the Redeemer. Alleluia of course means to praise God. Now look at it after the Unitarian redactor got through with it:

From all that dwell below the skies
Let songs of hope and faith arise;
Let peace, good-will on earth be sung
Through every land, by every tongue.

Even the Unitarians would concede that it is easier to expunge God from a hymn than to remove Him from the universe. But do the Unitarians really want to do this? Do they really believe that we are alone in the universe? Is there no more to life than this vale of tears and no ultimate answer to the human predicament? Does it all end in death and darkness?

Their own Ralph Waldo Emerson negotiated with his own mind for something better than a hopeless, godless view of things. We would all do well to ponder this magnificent paragraph from his trenchant pen:

> The human heart requires a God. Some God, a true or a false one, it will and must have. There exists no mind but is possessed with love either of good or of evil. It will make a God of conscience, or of riches, or of power, or of science, or of honor, or of hatred, or of the belly. For everyone may see, who will look at the mind of a philosopher, that whoever made us, we were made not by ourselves, but from the beginning to the end of our structure and of our progress, do plainly discover a reference to something else than ourselves.

We plainly discover a reference to something else than ourselves, said the New England bard, and *We were not made by ourselves.* If there is Something or Someone beside ourselves who made us, He must he greater than ourselves. Is this not who God is? Emerson is not far from Paul's words in Rom. 1:20: "All that may be known of God by men lies plain before their eyes; indeed God himself has disclosed it to them. His invisible attributes, that is to say his everlasting power and Deity, have been visible, ever since the world began, to the eye of reason, in the things he has made."

There is much that we can all learn from the Unitarians. We can start with Emerson's emphasis on deeds rather than creeds: "Do not *say* things. What you *are* stands over you the while, and thunders, so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary." And so they say in *Unitarian Universalists Believe,* a brochure issued from their headquarters in Boston: "We are inspired and impressed 'by deeds not creeds.'" They practice what they preach in terms of working for peace and justice for all. They have special interest in criminal justice, calling for a moratorium on prison construction. They insist that only violent criminals should be incarcerated. Others should make restitution to their victims. They are convinced that the 700,000 we now have in prisons can be greatly reduced by getting at the root cause of crime: poverty, unemployment, racism, classism, sexism.

While it is refreshing to find a church that has such concern for social justice, there is reflected here the basic fallacy of humanism. It is also evident in such affirmations as : "This new liberal religious movement re-affirms a positive faith in humanity" and "We assert the goodness of the individual person."

The fallacy is that there is nothing really wrong with mankind that a proper environment (social justice) cannot correct. This sanguine view of human nature fails the test of history as well as our own personal experience. In the light of history how can we believe in the basic goodness of man? It is evident that there is something dreadfully wrong with humankind, *basically* wrong. The Bible identifies it as sin. A religion that ignores the reality of sin can make no lasting contribution to the alleviation of human suffering, for man suffers (for the most part) because he sins against his Creator. Human nature must be changed from within. The Bible calls this repentance or reformation. Only changed people can really change society. Social justice is inextricably tied to personal righteousness.

As for what Unitarians believe about Jesus, they agree with Benjamin Franklin that his morals and religion are the best, but they question his divinity. They speak of Jesus' moral grandeur and nobility of character, and they draw inspiration from "the human Jesus." And they disavow any intention of belittling Jesus when they conclude that the traditional churches have corrupted his teaching.

If the Unitarians really followed Jesus on the basis of his moral grandeur and nobility of character, they might not be far from his first disciples who must have followed him without much of a theological base. In any event Jesus himself had a rather liberal view of discipleship: "He who comes to me I will in no wise cast out" (Jn. 6:37). The church must not be too prescriptive of the reasons why people follow Jesus, and it must certainly refrain from casting out those that Jesus receives, which *might* include Unitarians.

The time was when the Unitarians believed in the divinity of Jesus. William Ellery Channing, the liberal Congregational minister of Boston who shocked the orthodox clergy of his day by rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity, was a founding father of Unitarianism in this country. In his 1815 sermon on "Unitarian Christianity" he exalted Jesus as the Savior of the world, stating that the Christ was sent by God to effect the "moral and spiritual deliverance of mankind." But Jesus was not God, Channing insisted, thus rejecting the notion of the Trinity.

Later James Freeman Clarke liberalized the Unitarian "Affirmation" (They don't believe in creeds!) to read: "The fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, and the progress of mankind onward and upward forever." As the Unitarians became more humanistic Jesus became "a leader" instead of "the Savior," and in time they became indistinguishable from the Universalists, who not only rejected the Trinity but proclaimed universal salvation. In recent years these two have united and they are now the Unitarian Universalist Association of Churches and Fellowships in North America. They do not consider themselves "a Christian church" and do not claim to be Christians, though a Christian can be a Unitarian if he chose to, just as a Moslem or a Buddhist could.

In the early days when they *were* a Christian church, even if not Trinitarian, there was some affinity with the Campbellites, one reason being that Alexander Campbell also questioned the doctrine of the Trinity. The Unitarians also embraced Campbell because of his plea for unity on a non-creedal basis and his rejection of theological systems. Campbell knew that he could always preach in a Unitarian church, even when all others in town closed their doors to him, and he often did.

As for the Unitarians' greatest virtue and the one we would do well to emulate, I would name their openness to new ideas and their willingness to listen to each other and to others in their search for truth. How many Christian churches today could say the following?

> Unitarian Universalists can be completely honest with one another. There is no "conforming" to which they must adhere. They can speak their minds on all issues freely, for there are no "off limit" sign. no forbidden areas of thought. no prohibited doubts, that will make one an outcast.

If this kind of openness and honesty is also part of what it means to be a Christian, and if we compare the attitude and behavior of our churches to that of the Unitarian, we can justly raise the question as to who is more Christian after all. —*the Editor.*

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THE FOUR HALLELUJAHS

It is a word that has barely had a place in my vocabulary, for I am more likely to say *Praise God!* in English than to say Hallelujah! in Hebrew. Yet in its transliterated form it takes its place as one of the most beautiful words in the English language. And certainly one of the most beautiful in the Bible, but, surprisingly enough, it occurs only four times, all in Rev. 19. It is those four hallelujahs that I am writing about.

But first a word about what this term conjures up in my mind. I've never been able to spell it and always have to look it up. Not only because the *l's* are hard to keep straight, but also because it is spelled at least three different ways: hallelujah, halleluiah, alleluia. It is actually an interjection and should appear as *Hallelujah!* The Hebrew original verb is imperative, *Praise!*, joined to the name of God, *Jah* or *Yahweh*, and so it means *Praise Yahweh!* or *Praise the Lord!* So, something like NL Club means Hallelujah Club.

And I always seem to associate the word with Handel's *Messiah* and its great Hallelujah chorus. And when the word comes to mind the majestic cadence of that great chorus with its repetitious *Hallelujahs!* race through my mind, which are surely among the greatest lines in the history of music.

It is the voice of a great multitude that issues the four hallelujahs. This great host is earlier described as "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" (Rev. 7:9), and they stand before the throne of God with white robes and Palm branches in their hands. They are joined by all the angels, the elders, and the four living creatures, who supposedly represent all humankind, and together they praise God: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen!" They are identified as those who come out of the great tribulation. They are before the throne and continually serve God. The Lamb is named as their shepherd and God wipes all tears from their eyes.

In Rev.14 their number is given as 144,000, which may be another way of naming a great multitude. Now their praises sound like "harpists playing their harps," and they sing a new song, one known only to them. It is in this context that an angel cries out' "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on," and John is told to write that down, as a promise to us who read and believe.

In Rev. 19 the multitude is heard again, and this time they worship God in the four hallelujahs. The first one in verse 1 is: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God!" These attributes of God reflect what we often find in the Psalms (such

as "His glory is above the heavens" in Ps. 113:4), and they show why God should be worshipped. The attributes that this hallelujah assigns to God are the ones assumed by man, who supposes he can save himself and that he is powerful and has glory and honor.

The second hallelujah comes in verse 3: "Hallelujah! And her smoke rises up forever and ever!" The reference is to the great harlot, Babylon, which symbolizes pagan Rome and all her arrogance against God, the system of evil that persecuted the saints and made merchandise of all that is good and holy. Already the believers had been told to "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (18:4), and already her doom had been pronounced, "Babylon the great is fallen" (18:2). This hallelujah recognizes that her fall is final, and that we are to praise God for his victory over evil. It reassures us that all evil is doomed to destruction, sooner or later, and that we are on the winning side. It is cause to praise God.

Verse 4 has the third hallelujah: "And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, saying, 'Amen! Hallelujah!'" The word *Amen* is itself a prayer, for it says something like Let *it be so!* or *Thy will be done!* If in the Old Testament church there was the refrain "And all the people shall say Amen" when God's curses were pronounced (DL 27), and if in the New Testament church there was the Amen at the giving of thanks (1 Cor. 14:15) we would do well in our assemblies to have a chorus of *Amens.* Those in heaven were making an affirmation in their cry *of Hallelujah! Amen!,* as if to say as they bowed before the God of heaven, *We believe!* It is noteworthy that in the same book (3:14) Jesus Christ himself is called the *Amen,* as if to say he is the essence of the faith, or he is God's affirmation of himself.

The fourth hallelujah is given a unique setting in that the great heavenly multitude now sounds like "the sound of many waters and the sound of mighty thunderings" (verse 6). Out of this crescendo of heavenly praise, which must have been breathtaking to the apostle John, comes "Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns!" It is as if nothing else matters. If the God of heaven, who is "the Omnipotent One," reigns over the universe and rules in the affairs of men, then we need not fear. That exclamation of praise goes far in telling us what the kingdom of God is - *God reigns!* It is something to shout like thunder about.

It is instructive that this fourth hallelujah that points to God reigning in the universe is followed by "Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory." That is what praising God is all about, giving him glory, which means that we recognize that he is the glorious God of heaven. When we are glad and rejoice it is because we believe the great truths about God as are implied in the four hallelujahs, and so we praise him.

These four hallelujahs teach us how to praise God. We can join the angelic host and heavenly multitude of great souls made perfect and worship God in the same way they do. What a thought it is if the angels in heaven could here an outburst of praise on earth that sounded like mighty thundering. emanating from believers all around the world who cry Out, *Hallelujah! Amen! God Reigns! Babylon is fallen! To him belong salvation, power. honor, and glory!*

Who knows but what the praise of any one of us is heard in heaven like the sound of many waters. And how glorious to realize that while upon our knees lifting up holy hands we join the great assembly of God in heaven as it praises him who sits upon the throne - our loved ones, our little ones, our dear sisters and brothers in the Lord, the great saints of all the ages, a great multitude that no one can number.

Can't you hear them praising God, and does it not sound something like many waters flowing and great thunderings cascading across the heavens? And can we not join them as they praise the Almighty?

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!, Hallelujah!, Hallelujah! — the Editor

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DID YOU CHOOSE GOD OR DID GOD CHOOSE YOU?

You did not choose Me, but I chose you. —Jn. 15.16

Ancient mariners had a fear of what has come to be known as the dilemma of Scylla and Charybdis. According to Greek mythology the beautiful goddess Scylla was changed into a hideous monster when a rival goddess poisoned the pool in which she bathed. Scylla threw herself into the sea between Italy and Sicily and became the dangerous rocks that sailors feared. Opposite the rocks was a treacherous whirlpool called Charybdis. It took an able pilot to steer a ship between the pitfalls of Scylla and Charybdis.

The question I pose in this essay requires us to sail between the Scylla of God's sovereignty and the Charybdis of human responsibility. Disaster awaits us if we interpret Scripture in such a way as to neglect either God's initiative (identified in Scripture as calling, election, predestination) or man's response to that initiative in terms of faith and obedience.

Have I already presumed your answer to the question of whether you chose God or God chose you? Your answer is both, of course, for God certainly chose us, as the Scriptures make clear, and we chose Him in that we responded to His call. But my question is intended to suggest that the answer is not that simple. The question of God's election must remain a

mystery. While it defies any ready answer, we must realize that the crucial truth is that God chose us. It is his grace toward us, predestined even in eternity, that really matters. Yes, of course, we make a response, but even this falls within His sovereignty. This means that we steer closer to Scylla than to Charybdis.

Illustrations can sometimes clarify profound truths. The best I have heard relative to this question came from a Presbyterian minister who believes both in God's election and man's freewill. It is like standing before the door of salvation, he observed. On the door is inscribed "Whosoever will may come" and that includes people of all races, all nations, all colors. Once one enters the door of salvation he looks back at the other side of the door and sees the inscription "You didn't choose me, I chose you."

So maybe the answer to our question is something like *I chose God but only because he first chose me.* We might even venture to say that God chose (decreed, predestined) that we would choose Him. But before we venture further let us call the apostles and even Jesus himself on board to help us sail between the Scylla of God's sovereignty and the Charybdis of human responsibility. What saith the Scriptures?

> Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom. 8:29-30)
>
> Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sorts through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (Eph. 1:4-5)
>
> To the exiles of the dispersion, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. (1 Pet.1:2)
>
> The elder to the elect lady and her children. (2 Jn. 1)
>
> To those who are called. beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. (Jude 1)
>
> If the lord had not shortened the days, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. (Mt.13:2)

This testimony from both Christ and his apostles is sufficient to establish the fact of God's election of his chosen ones, even before the foundation of the world. It is a question of whether God's call or election is absolute or conditional. Notice these passages that point to the Charybdis of human responsibility, which show that God's grace and man's faith go together.

> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. (Mt. 6:33)
>
> Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened unto you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Mt. 7:7-8)
>
> He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him. (Jn. 3:36)
>
> If one loves God, one is known by him. (1 Cor. 8:3)
>
> I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it' lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:26-27)

When one notes the many action verbs in the New Testament, such as seek, ask, knock, believe, obey, run, love, he can only conclude that God's gracious call is conditional. While Paul is the one who said so much about God's call and election, he realized that he had a response to make, a charge to keep, or even he, after preaching to others, could lose the prize, as 1 Cor 9:26-27 indicates.

This means that we are to cooperate with God," as it were, in order for our calling and election to be sure. Rom. 8:28 demands such a conclusion, especially when read in the *New English Bible*, which gives proper place to the Greek word *sunergei* (work together): "in everything, as we know, he cooperates for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Paul here refers to the calling, but in reference to God and man cooperating. God first loves us, but we are to return the love. God in his grace gives us the gospel of Jesus Christ, but we are to believe and obey it.

It is remarkable that those who say the most about the verbal inspiration of the Bible are often the ones who insist upon an absolute predestination, apart from any human initiative. And yet they are the first to dismiss the apostle's word *sunergei* in Rom. 8:28, an inspired word that shows that God and man cooperate in the holy calling. Only human tradition keeps one from seeing what Paul clearly states in this passage.

Another illustration may help. Let's say you offer me a ride to Houston in your new Cadillac. You have "decreed" and "predestined" the trip. It is certain, even predetermined, that you and the Cadillac are going to Houston on a given date, and you "call" me to go along. I trust you. I accept your invitation, and so I am "called" to go to Houston. I am seated comfortably and securely in the Cadillac, and I am cooperating in that I am doing what a good passenger does. But that does not mean that it is an *absolute* predestination, for I can open the door and leave the car if I am fool enough to reject your grace. If I remained in the car and arrived safely in Houston, it would be foolish for me to contend that I earned it or worked for it. The fact that I cooperated makes it no less the case that it was only by your grace that I arrived in Houston.

There is Alexander Campbell's illustration. A father and son standing onshore see a ship in distress at sea. The father sends his son to rescue the passengers. Extending his oar to the perishing people, the son urges them into the boat. Those who accept his offer not only climb into the boat but assist in rowing to safety.

By no logic could it be argued that they saved themselves or that they deserved it. It was only the goodness of the father and his son that they were saved, and yet it was conditioned upon their responding to the grace proffered.

Our call or election is in Christ (Eph. 1:5), who himself was predestined from eternity to be our Savior (Acts 2:23). In accepting him we are in union with him and with what God has ordained for him (Rom. 6:5*).* So, our security is in him and we will be in heaven with him if we remain faithful. But as in the ride to Houston ,if I am foolish enough to renounce my faith in Christ and take up a life of sin, I have forfeited my security. While we can be fully confident that that will not happen to us, the Bible makes it clear that it can and does happen in some cases. Paul's language in Gal. 4:8-9 persuades me that he would approve of my Cadillac illustration:

> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elements of the world and become slaves all over again?

Could a case be any clearer than that the Galatians were once in bondage to false gods but turned to the true God and were thus known (loved) by Him, and then "turned back again" and once more became slaves? They were safe and secure in the "Cadillac," but left it.

We have a hint in this passage that foreknowledge means to fore-love, that God loves us before we love Him. This is confirmed by 1 Cor.8:3: "If one loves God, one is known by Him." Several passages, such as 1 John 4, make it clear that knowing and loving mean virtually the same thing.

So, the answer to our opening question is that God is the Great Initiator or "the Hound of Heaven," and it is He who first called us, fore-loved us, and extended to us His free gift of salvation. This is the grace of God, but it is not irresistible grace as the Calvinists would have us believe, for men *do* resist it. Those of us who choose God, or love Him who first loved us, accept His grace. "By grace are you saved through faith," as the apostle puts it in Eph. 2:8.

This points up Jesus' assurance to his disciples, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." The disciples, of course, had a choice to make, and it was to follow Christ. But the choice was possible only because God had first chosen them.

What manner of grace is it that loved us and called us even in and for eternity! — *the Editor*

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UNITY AND THE JUDGMENT

Victor Knowles

"After all is said and done, more is said than done."

Wise words, those. And very painful as well. The truth hurts. But we need the truth. The truth will make us free.

The quote that we began with is particularly true when it comes to our words and action concerning Christian unity. We all know that religious division is contrary to God's plan (I Cor. 1:10). We are aware that the unity of all believers everywhere is what our Lord prayed for (John 17:20, 21). But after all is said and done, more is said than done! We talk a good game but play it rather poorly. Not that noble efforts have not and are not being made by some to bridge the gap between estranged brethren in Christ.

Since August of 1984 five national meetings between leaders of Churches of Christ (non-instrumental) and Churches of Christ and Christian Churches (instrumental) have taken place. Hundreds of brethren have met for prayer, study, and discussion at Joplin, Missouri; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Malibu, California; Milligan College, Tennessee; and Cincinnati, Ohio. Another "Restoration Forum" is planned for May of 1988. Several regional and local "grassroots" efforts have also taken place across the nation. A new periodical reporting these meetings, *One Body,* has been launched by Don DeWelt of Joplin, Missouri.

But by and large, many brethren are content to just talk about unity. An old black preacher sagaciously observed, "Ev'rybody talkin' 'bout hebbin ain't gwine there." The same is true concerning Christian unity. How can we do more than just talk about unity? It is imperative that we do more than just talk because the apostle John urges us to love in deed and truth and not just in word and tongue (I John 3:18).

One thing that would help motivate us into greater action is to contemplate what will happen after all is said and done—period! We are mortal beings. We have an appointed end. But the end is not really the end. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (11eb. 9:27). All of us are going to die. All of us are going to stand in the judgment. What then?

It will be too late then to sort things out and work for the unity God intended (Eph. 4:4-6). It will be too late to answer Christ's great prayer for unity (John 17). It will be too late then to heed the apostle's admonitions for Christian unity (Phil. 3:16). This should sober us up as nothing else can. "When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more"-what then? If we aren't answering God's roll call down here, how can we answer it up there? This is serious business!

The Bible clearly teaches that "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). That means every one of us. But we will not stand before God collectively. We will not stand as a brotherhood or even as a congregation. We will not stand as a group of preachers or editors. "Each of us." says Paul, "shall give an account of himself to God" (Rom.l4:l2).

What does this have to do with working for the unity of all believers? Much! Isn't it significant that the passages of scripture we've cited concerning the judgment (Rom 14:10-12) are found right in the heart of a chapter that deals with the matter of brethren who are judging each other. God wanted these brethren to settle their differences before the final judgment. Paul begins this chapter by telling them not to reject each other over disputable matters (Rom. 14:1). He instructs them not to despise each other or judge each other (Rom. 14:2,3). He asks them, "Why do you judge your brother?" (Rom. 14:10). It is in this context that the apostle then gives his oft-quoted teaching on the judgment seat of Christ

It is extremely important that we settle up with each other before God settles up with us. Doesn't that make sense? Some day you and I are going to stand in the judgment and give an account of the way we treated (or mistreated or failed to treat) our brothers in Christ-brethren for whom Christ died (Rom. 14:9). What am I going to say for myself if I have made no attempt to receive one of God's children as my brethren? Worse yet, what will I say if I have been so foolish as to reject and judge a brother for whom Christ dies? Even more horrible to contemplate, what is God going to say to me for my boorish behavior?

Let's be wise enough to take a long look at this matter of Christian unity. This is not a petty, peripheral issue. We're talking life and death, righteousness and judgment, heaven and hell. Nothing could be more vital or serious. But let's go beyond words. Let's enter into the real world and start doing something about our dreadful state of division. Work for the unity for which our dear Lord lived and died.

What can you do today for the cause of Christian unity? Work for unity in your local congregation. Be a peacemaker. Visit your brethren across town whenever you can. Invite someone over for dinner. Take someone out for lunch. Pray together. Study together. Talk. Listen. Ask questions. Be respectful. Be humble. Be compassionate. Be hopeful.

Above all remember that "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" After all is said and done, that's the way it is going to be. God has already received us (Rom. 14:3). Christ has already received us to the glory of God (Rom. *15:7).* Let's receive each other now so we can both be received in the judgment. — *Victor Knowles is editor of* <u>*One Body*</u> *and a participant in the Restoration Forums, 125 E. Fairview, Carthage, MO 64836.*

> Though not agreeing at all, with some of their opinions and practices, I nevertheless preach amongst all, having seen for many years how greatly the heart of the Lord Jesus must be grieved by the dis-union that exists among His own true disciples. On this account, therefore, I have sought (in my feeble measure) to unite all real believers; but, as this cannot be done, by standing aloof from our brethren in Christ, until they see eye to eye with us. in every point, I have gone amongst them, and have united with them. insofar as nothing has been required of me which I could not do with a good conscience.
> —*George Muller*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

It may tax your credulity to believe it, but I set this entire issue, except for "The Four Hallelujahs" which Ouida had set already, on our new computer. I had resolved not to touch it, assigning it to Ouida's domain. But Ouida did a number on me. Due to overtaxing her hands, not only on the computer but by lifting her mother so much, she came down with tendonitis. It was either learn to work the computer myself or have no March issue. Ouida sat beside me and

told me what to do. My experience at the typewriter helped. Laying out the pages on the Pagemaker is like doing magic, such as raising or lowering columns of words as one would a window shade, or typing in tides and headings in the margin and then "dragging" them to where you want them on the page. I am something like the boy that saw a giraffe for the first time and insisted "There ain't no such animal!" Ouida is trying to con me into composing directly into the computer and bypassing the typewriter. That will probably be next. I have also been doing more of the house- work and caring for Mother Pitts, who is more and more out of it. Only today she told Ouida that she hoped she'd be able to find a man worthy of her. Ouida was lamenting her senility when I corrected her, "what do you mean, I think she gave you very good advice!"

I attended the celebration of the bicentennial of Alexander Campbell's birth at TCU, sponsored by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. Participants were from all three major wings of the movement that emanated from Campbell's labors and there was a good spirit of cooperation and a wholesome respect for our common heritage. Sessions were also held at the Richland Hills Church of Christ.

The East Maple Street Chapel in Hartford, Illinois invites all participants in the Hartford Forum from 1958-1973 to a reunion May20 (2:00 to 4:00p.m.) and May 21 (9:30 a.m. to 2:30p.m.) Carl Ketcherside and I started the Forum in *1958* and were joint participants in most of the fifteen forums that followed, and we will both be present for the reunion. It would be great to see all our old Forum friends once more. This annual affair had a great influence in providing an atmosphere in which diverse views on unity and fellowship could be freely introduced and discussed, and it deserves an honored place in our history. Everyone of course is invited, but those who spoke on the programs are especially urged to be present. Contact B. E. McCann, 127 Donna Dr., Hartford, Il.62048.

An interesting news item from the Disciples of Christ: Their Commission on Theology and Christian Unity is engaged in a serious study on "Salvation in 3esus Christ," which was assigned to it by the Louisville General Assembly. Made up of both lay and professional theologians, the group does not plan a "political" response but one that is deeply theological and related to what every Disciple affirms, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Another item: The Disciples have now had their tenth dialogue session with Roman Catholics. They are now discussing "Continuity of the Church in the Apostolic Tradition." Both churches affirm that there is an apostolic tradition to be remembered and witnessed to.

Our readers in the Dallas area might be interested in a series I will be giving on "Our Heritage and Destiny" to the combined adult classes of the Lake Highlands Christian Church (Disciples) on the second, third, and fourth Sundays of April. The church is next door to the Lake Highlands Church of Christ: I wish we could all get together for this, for I will show that

we have a great deal in common in our heritage and much we could share in our destiny. Earlier in the year I did something similar to this for a class at Pittman Creek Church of Christ in Plano, which is in the same general area.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

I was honored that an article of mine was published in Christian Standard, especially with an article by you in the same edition! They put me in good company. I read a lot of material and I know of few, if *any.* publications that maintain the consistent high quality of Restoration Review . — *Charles Turner, Friendswood, Tx.*

(Writing for and with others is delightful and meaningful fellowship. I was pleased to write for the last issue of *Mission,* then in *Christian Standard* and *One Body,* journals related to Christian Churches, and I will soon have an essay on "Alexander Campbell: Tragedy and Triumph" in *The Disciple,* an official publication of Disciples of Christ. You would do well to read any or all of these papers. Addresses are: *Christian Standard,* 1821 Hamilton Ave., Cincinnati, Oh. 45231 ($14.75 *per annum); One Body,* 1111 N. Main, Joplin, Mo. 64801 (free on request); *The Disciple,* Box 179, St. Louis, Mo. 63166 ($10.00 per annum*).*— Ed.)

I really like your series on your visitation to various Denton churches. I never attended a church service I didn't find something of interest or inspiration, whether at a high church Episcopalian or a small Pentecostal group in a clapboard building on the other side of the tracks. I pity those who Christianity is limited to their own little group . — *Chaplain T. F. McNabb, Brown Mills, N.J.*

I don't know how I started receiving the magazine, but I suppose some unknown person sent it to me. I tossed many of the first issues. assuming it to be another sectarian organ of the Church of Christ denomination. Fortunately, I decided to quit being judgmental and read an issue. I was delighted and encouraged to find a paper that believes in the grace of God and the fellowship of believers. Enclosed is my renewal.—*Texas*

(We get numerous responses like this from those who were sent the paper by someone else. This might encourage you to send in that club of four or mere. You can always think of that many people who might respond as this man did. - *Ed.)*

Many in our brotherhood have lost sight of the Restoration Plea. Instead opinions have become tests of orthodoxy and we've grown content to perpetuate our own spiritual species without the liberty that Christ has given to us. Your publication is a breath of fresh air. Your *The Stone-Campbell Movement* inflamed me with a desire to be as seeker of God's truth no matter where that truth may lead. — *Randall Massie, Jacksonville, IL.*

Please don't retire. Our people need your teaching. — *Helen P. Murray, Murfreesboro, Tn.*

We saw and heard many Communist authorities in the Slavic world not only tolerate, but ask and encourage Christians to minister to social needs, especially with the growing problem of drug addiction and alcohol abuse. — *Steve Bilak, Lausanne, Switzerland.*

Is "restoration of the primitive church" an opinion? If not, where does the New Testament say that "the primitive church" must be maintained or restored? — *Rev. Dr. Hugh W. Weston, Palm Desert, Ca.*

(I wrote this revered doctor that it is an opinion, and not a very defensible one at that. Those who read my history book will see that by and large the Stone-Campbell movement was a unity movement more than it was a restoration movement as understood in the above question. — *Ed.)*

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BOOK NOTES

Evangelical Renewal in the Mainline Churches, edited by Ronald H. Nash, will hold interest for our readers, one reason being there is a chapter on the Disciples of Christ by Grant Edwards. which not only quotes from my history book, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, but refers to this journal in its treatment of renewal efforts within the larger Disciples heritage. Because of its irenic spirit, Edwards writes, *Restoration Review* is read by all three churches of the movement. But there is much more. It might surprise you what is going on among Roman Catholics and Presbyterians, for example. We can supply this book at $7.95 postpaid.

The Bible Speaks to You by Robert McAfee Brown is one of the few books that lean linger with and come back to over and over. It is delightfully informative and relevant. He not only zaps one with a lot of stuff one has never thought about on what the Bible is and where it came from, but challenges one to think anew on what the Bible means by such topics as the last judgment, the Second Coming, and what happens when we die. $9.95 postpaid.

The Bible dictionary I use and highly recommend is *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by one of my old profs at Princeton, Henry Snyder Gehman. It is a veritable goldmine of information. *The Christian Century* says it is "a giant and a bargain." $22.95.

Two titles on our own history while they are still available: *Life of Elder John Smith* by John Williams, which is the story of old "Raccoon," the pioneer preacher of Kentucky ($16.95 postpaid); and *Moses lard: The Prince of Preachers* by Kenneth Van Deusen, which has an appendix on Lard's essay on Alexander Campbell ($14.95 postpaid).

We will send you 18 back issues of this journal, selected at random over the past 25 years, for only $3.00. This is a way for you to sample what we have been saying through the years.

You may still receive a free copy of The Stone-Campbell Movement by Leroy Garrett, regular price $21.95, when you send us eight subs, new or renewal, including your own, at $3.00 per name, total $24.00.

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